

The Heroes of Social Work

Making a Difference for Children and Families
by Richard Bermack

Social Worker Jacob Ocampo with Maya and her baby

To Make a Difference

Social work is about transformation and change.

It is about healing relationships.

It is about providing a sense of well-being to those whose lives have been fractured.

Social work is a profession for those who care about other people and want to reach out to those in trouble.

It is a profession for those who believe in the power of people to change and the power to give people a better future.

It is about helping parents create nurturing homes for their children, freeing children from the scars of childhood abuse.

And most importantly, it is about breaking the cycle of abuse.

It is about helping people with disabilities to live fuller lives and protecting the elderly so that they can live out their lives in peace and security.

California needs more social workers.

A recent study by the state legislature found that to protect California's children, families, and adults adequately, counties need twice the number of social workers they currently employ.

The following is a work in progress.

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For more information about the exhibit, go to www.seiu535.org/socialwork/ or www.2makeadifference.org, e-mail swa-campaign@rb68.com, or contact Richard Bermack, 2600 10th Street, Berkeley, CA 94710, 510 548-3215.

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California needs twice its current number of social workers



Reach Out and Make a Difference



Tinker,
Tailor,
Soldier,
Sailor,
Rich Man,
Poor Man,
Beggar Man,
Thief.

Orangewood Nursery
Social Worker Katherin
Lujan

It All Begins in Childhood



Abused and neglected children are less likely to succeed. Exposure to stress, trauma and persistent fear can change a child's brain chemistry, causing the child to have lifelong psychological and social problems.

Abused and neglected children exhibit poor initiative, poor language skills and other developmental delays, a disproportionate amount of failure, and increased risks for alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempts. They are 53% more likely to be arrested as juveniles and 38% more likely to be arrested for violent crime.

Social workers investigate 2 million reports of child abuse or neglect per year in the United States, involving 3 million children. Over 1 million cases are confirmed. Social workers provide services to make the home safe or find the child a new home, and then heal the victim and break the cycle of abuse.

**Social workers investigate 2 million reports
of child abuse or neglect per year**



Los Angeles Emergency
Response Worker
Terence Rice



Monterey County Emergency Response Worker Edna Hansen

Social Workers Make A Difference



Steve and Paula, with four of their five children,
and social worker Diane Brown (center)



Steve is the manager of a fast food restaurant. He and his wife, Paula completed a parenting class as part of a reunification plan. Steve:

"I learned that it was okay to have emotions as a parent and children are work. I knew in business you had to be consistent to make money, and I thought I ran my household like a business. But I learned the bottom line doesn't matter. In the household it is the consistency and the message you are sending the kids. Ever since I started practicing what Diane taught in her class, my crazy life has become somewhat manageable.

"The unmanageableness came from the size of the family. We have twin five-year-olds, a three-year-old baby, and our oldest is nine. It puts a lot of stress on us and we reacted with our children. We let anger rule our feelings, we let kindness rule our feelings.

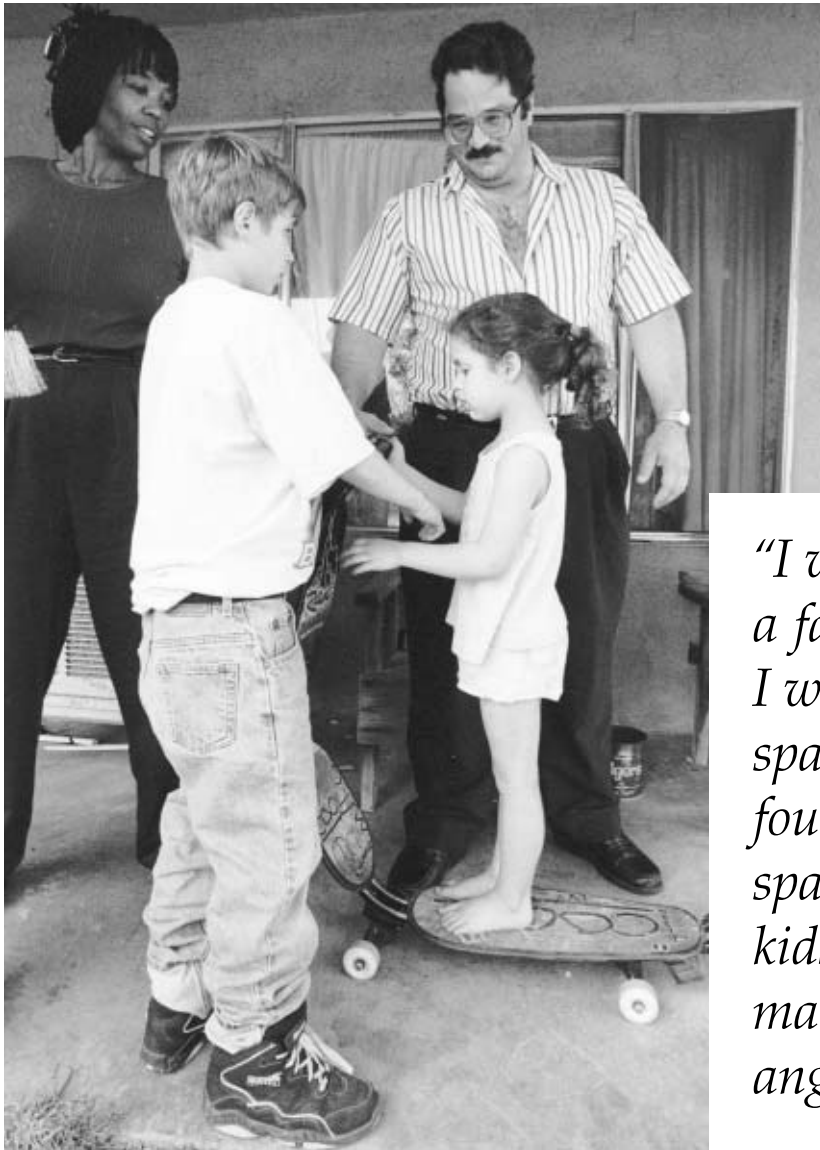
Now we don't let that come into play. What is right for the child and wrong for the child is what matters. My emotions would vary from day to day and my kids, would pick up on Dad's highs and lows, and they weren't identifying with my message statement.

"I already knew the difference between abuse and non-abuse. They focused on consistent behavior and giving children a consistent message. I refocused on what my job is, the passion for parenting, and learned to ask for help if I need it and not to let pride get in the way."

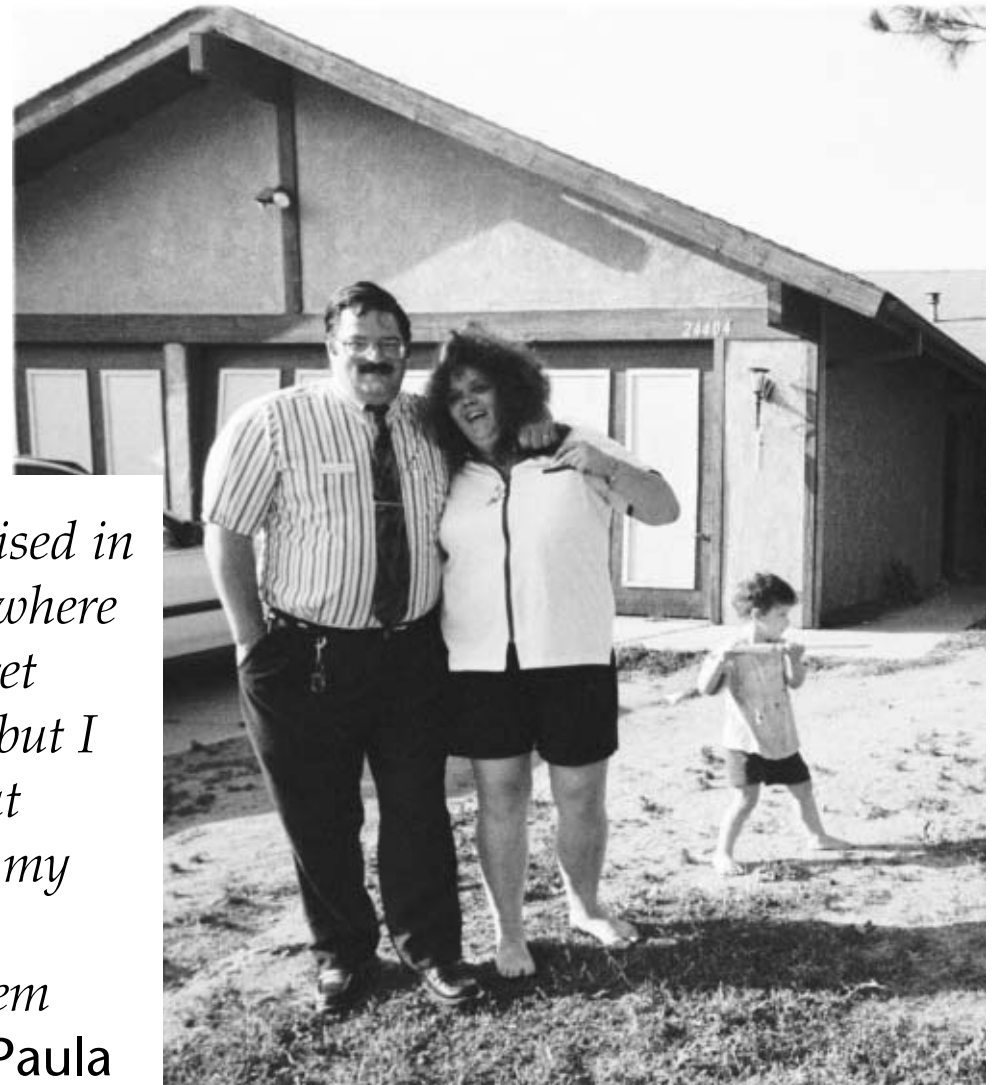


"Ever since I started practicing what Diane taught in her parenting class, my crazy life has become somewhat manageable."

Steve



"I was raised in a family where I would get spanked, but I found that spanking my kids only makes them angry." Paula



Parenting classes keep families together

It takes a relationship to cure addiction



Social Worker Valerie Golden (right) with Stephany

“Up to 80 percent of foster care cases have substance abuse at their root.”

*Now In Our Hands: Caring for California's
Abused and Neglected Children*

When Monterey County children's services worker Valerie Golden got Stephany's case, Stephany felt that she had no future. She had already lost her first set of kids, and was about to lose her last remaining son, whom she had voluntarily given up to the system because she felt she was unable to take care of him. “I was doing so much drugs that I didn't want my son around. I brought up my other two kids in a drug environment and I didn't want him in it.” Her ex-husband had fled the state with her first two kids to get away from her. “I was using crack-cocaine and alcohol and he wanted to take them away from that. I had no clue at the time what was happening to me. I couldn't see my future. It took Valerie to help me find it.”

Unlike many of the people in the system, Stephany came from a wealthy family. Her father owned an electronics business. “My dad had nice cars and airplanes. We used to go flying. But that is the thing about crack-cocaine. It doesn't matter where you come from. You get introduced to it and it will bring you down. When you are smoking you aren't even aware of your kids. You can be smoking right in front of them, or lock yourself in a room and leave them out there with no food, no clothing, no nothing. You don't care.”

Stephany had already failed a previous reunification attempt and a drug recovery program. “I had other social workers before, but they were all rushed and didn't have time for me. I went through other programs and fooled people,” Stephany



reflected. “But Valerie was really there for me. She was real harsh at first. I had to see her once a week, and she let me know I had to get serious if I wanted to have my kids in my life.”

“When I first met Stephany, I didn't feel she was being honest,” recalls Golden. “But then I saw her change and a different Stephany emerge. She would come in crying and tell me what was going on. Then she started to become more genuine and to look more healthy.”

As in many social work cases, the turning point was a crisis and Golden's ability to be there for Stephany in her moment of need. “I was having a conflict with my partner, a domestic dispute, and the sheriff was there,” Stephany explained. “I called Valerie and she came right over to make sure my child

was safe. Having her support, right there in the moment, it really made a difference.”

Stephany was lucky. Before becoming a social worker, Golden had administered a drug rehabilitation program for women. She had a wealth of professional experience dealing with drug addicts. With Golden’s help Stephany continued therapy, completed a residential drug treatment program, and was able to reunify with her children.

“When you are smoking crack-cocaine you aren’t even aware of your kids....I couldn’t see my future. It took someone like Valerie to show me the way.”

Stephany



Social Workers Make A Difference

It takes someone who understands



Jann Noddin, Alameda County Family Preservation Worker, with Erica

The abused child. . . is alone with her suffering, not only within the family but also within herself. And because she cannot share her pain with anyone, she is also unable to create a place in her own soul where she could "Cry her heart out." . . . Defenselessness and helplessness find no haven in the self of the child, who later identifying with the aggressor, persecutes these qualities wherever they appear.

Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good:
Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing
and the Roots of Violence*

Jann Noddin and Erica

Being able to talk to someone who understands can make the difference between abused children healing and becoming healthy, functioning adults or turning to violence and self-destructive behavior. For many abused and neglected children, their social worker is the only one there to listen and help.

When social worker Jann Noddin first met 13-year-old Erica, Erica had been abandoned by her mother and left without food for 4 days. Jann was able to find her a new home with her aunt and uncle. With the love and support of her new parents, and Jann's counseling, Erica started to trust the world again and was able to confront the painful experiences of her past. After a year, she revealed that her last step-father had repeatedly molested her.

ERICA: "Me and my little brother don't know who our dads are, so my mom would use other guys to be our fathers. She'd go to bars every night and invite a lot of guys over and all of a sudden they were our new dad. Finally she quit that and all of a sudden we were church-o-mania. We would go to church all

the time. But her last husband, he would beat her up, and he molested me from when I was 7 years old until I was 11. And then after a while, I told on him. To clue that I was molested, I acted kind of strange. And I didn't do a lot of my homework, and I was off in my own land, my own planet."

JANN: "Erica's reaction of being in her own world is a typical reaction of children who have been abused. It is similar to a woman who has been raped. She feels that she somehow deserved it, that treatment. So that what a child will do is cut that off, continue to isolate themselves.

"When I first met her, I introduced myself and explained to her what she was about to go through and validated that what she'd already gone through might have been scary or traumatic. I don't expect a child to trust me right away, especially an abused or neglected child, but I work to earn their trust over a period of time. I tell them I will meet with them as often as I can, and try to let them know that I am a person they can talk to when they feel comfortable about talking about things."

ERICA: "At first when she came along I wasn't sure of her. She was like, 'Hi,' and I was like, 'I don't think so.' I didn't want her for my counselor or a social worker. It took a while to get to know her better and trust her, and now she's like one of my best friends. She always tries to be there for me as much as she can.

"It's sad when I hear little kids get molested and nobody pays attention to them. It makes me so mad that nobody's giving them any attention. That is what social workers are for, and why they need them."



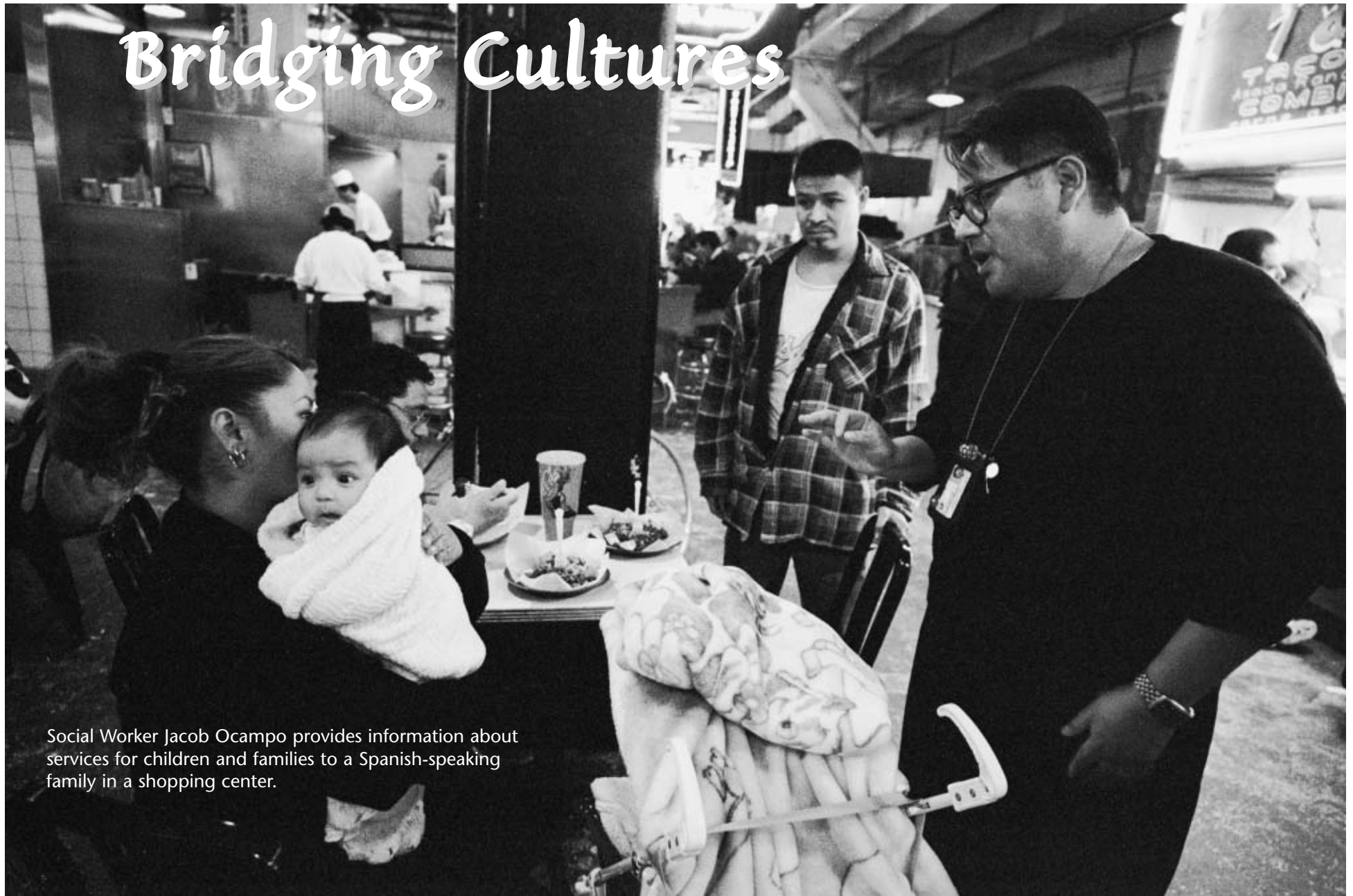
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Social Workers Make A Difference

Bridging Cultures

Social Worker Jacob Ocampo provides information about services for children and families to a Spanish-speaking family in a shopping center.



Los Angeles emergency response worker Jacob Ocampo has dedicated his life to helping children and parents become healthy families. He developed a parenting curriculum for Spanish-speaking parents, conducted parenting classes, and uses his time off to educate the community about child welfare issues. He understands the issues parents and children face. "I had a rough childhood, and it's only by a miracle that I didn't end up in the system," he states. "My dad used to beat me and my teachers would ask me why I had bruises all over my arms and legs. That was back in the 1960s and 1970s, before there were mandated reporting laws."

Ocampo's father immigrated from Guatemala and didn't understand how to raise a child in this culture. Ocampo has taken it on himself to provide the information his father didn't have to members of the community, especially Latinos. "Parents from different cultures can't understand the American laws about corporal punishment or leaving children alone—things that people normally do in other countries. So for a lack of knowledge, parents are having their kids taken away. And once in the system, the court procedures make it hard for them to get their children back. By just educating them we can keep them from having their kids end up in the system. We can save the taxpayers' money and avoid heartaches for these children and parents."

Ocampo describes some of the difficulties parents have once their children, especially teenagers, are in the foster care system. "Latino parents are very protective of their kids. They believe in strict discipline and use corporal punishment. All of a sudden, when a child is in a foster home, the child is overwhelmed with the freedom that foster parents give them. They have more freedom at school, more freedom to stay out late at night, better schools, better food, more affluence. Normally in a traditional culture girls may not date until they are 17 or 18, but in this culture they can go out when they are as young as 10

or 11. And boys too, they can stay out late. In Latino culture they have to be in by 9:00 or earlier. Then there is the issue of the clothes—being able to wear real loose clothing that their parents may not let them wear, baggy pants and caps turned around. Foster parents do a great job at what they do, but it is different. A lot of teenage kids don't want to go back to obeying their parents and will do things to end up back in foster care."

Ocampo worked with the Los Angeles Unified School District to create a parenting curriculum for Latino parents called Siempre Padres, Always Parenting. The course includes the laws on corporal punishment, positive discipline methods, acculturation, guidance on how parents should interact with the schools, and most important, the need for parents to spend quality time with their children.

One of Ocampo's greatest regrets was not being able to spend quality time with his father. Like many, his father expressed his love by being a good provider, which meant working all hours to run a successful business. He came home exhausted, with little time left to spend with his children. Siempre Padres reminds immigrant parents, working hard to make it in the new culture, of the importance of setting aside time to be parents.

"We get them to look at what type of interaction they are having with their children, how much quality time they are willing to devote, and for them to realize that will determine what type of relationship they will have with their children. People are getting lost working two jobs. They leave TV to educate their kids. Wake up in the morning, give them a breakfast bar, then to school. When school is over the kids go to after-school programs, and we don't see them until we pick them up at 6:00 pm." Ocampo knows the problem; as a social worker in LA County, working overtime, he has to struggle with his own schedule to be there for his own children—a regret that many children's social workers express.



Jacob Ocampo with Maya, an ex-client. While in foster care, Maya was stricken with cancer and was not expected to live. She recalls how Ocampo stuck with her, encouraging her through radiation, chemotherapy, and several operations. Ocampo would visit her on his days off and kept in touch even after she was no longer in his caseload. They hold photos taken at her high school graduation, which she attended in a wheelchair. She has a loving husband and just gave birth to a healthy child.



Alameda County Social Worker Yi Cheng (right, facing camera) works with Asian Community Mental Health Services Family Counselor Dorothea Ho (left) to provide culturally sensitive services in the family's native dialect.



Dorothea Ho, Asian Community Mental Health Services. County social workers often make use of non-profit agencies that provide specialized services to clients with particular needs.

Hospital personnel became concerned when these parents could not explain their child's broken arm. Unable to speak English, the parents became very upset, further alarming the hospital staff. Alameda County social worker Yi Cheng explains, "It is very difficult to get an accurate translation, and sometimes when Asian immigrants come in contact with the system they get frustrated and very emotional. They don't know how to act appropriately, and their behavior may be interpreted as non-cooperative or even psychotic."

Cheng brought in Dorothea Ho, a Cantonese-speaking family counselor with Asian Community Mental Health Services. "In the beginning the parents were defensive, not wanting to get involved," Ho recalls. But when Cheng found a school for the older child to attend, the parents started to accept that the social workers were there to help. Parenting classes were the next breakthrough. Ho recalls, "[The parents] started talking about where they came from in China, and slowly the feeling changed from us being strangers from an agency to friends. They would come to class early and actively take part in discussions. They even began bringing food to share with the class."

The classes cover everything from the stages in childhood development to cultural differences in schooling and what to expect from the education system. Racism is addressed, including both the immigrants' attitude towards people of other ethnic groups and how to respond when someone makes a racial slur toward them. The parents are given advice on how to differentiate between good and bad American cultural influences and how to help their kids when they get in trouble.

Once the parents realized what the agency had to offer, they made use of all the services they could. They regularly attended family therapy with the daughter who was in the system and brought their other daughter to therapy as well. In the end, the parents were very appreciative.



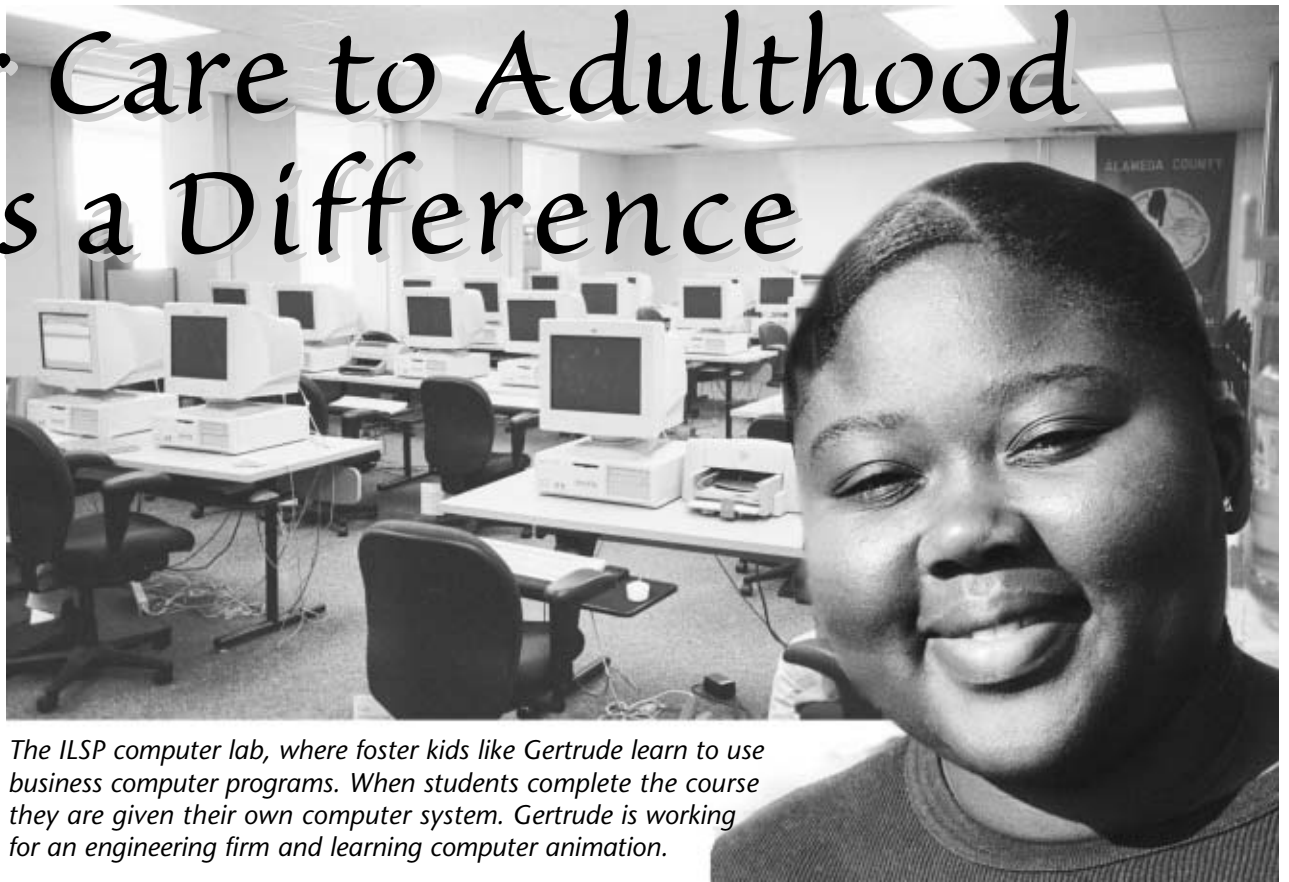
From Foster Care to Adulthood ILSP Makes a Difference

Independent Living Skills Program

The independent living programs attempt to provide foster youth help in making a successful transition to adulthood. The Alameda County Independent Living Skills Program was one of the original pilot projects, begun in 1987. The program works with foster youth 16 years old and older, helping them with education, employment, and housing. In short, ILSP is the last attempt by the system to help these kids become healthy, functioning adults.

Leonard Moncure and his supervisor Donna DeAngelis helped start the Alameda County program. Moncure has seen it grow from a handful of kids to the point that it now serves over half the eligible foster youth in Alameda County. His passion is encouraging foster youth to attend college. "We have 33 college graduates, including six with masters degrees, and we have one girl going for a PhD," he states with pride. "Of the 82 kids that are graduating from the ILSP program this year, about 18 will enroll in a four-year college."


"It took the kids seeing that someone else could make it," Moncure explains. "Before they didn't believe that a foster kid could get an education. When I told them they could go to college, they would say, 'Oh Mr. Moncure, you are always preaching, but no one has done that.' Now we have kids coming back and they can see their success. And not just the Einsteins, but the kids who had a hard time getting it together. When I first came here people had the attitude, get them a job and forget it. People act like foster



The ILSP computer lab, where foster kids like Gertrude learn to use business computer programs. When students complete the course they are given their own computer system. Gertrude is working for an engineering firm and learning computer animation.

kids are ogres. They think that anyone who is a ward of the court is a delinquent. Then they meet these kids, and the kids sell themselves."

What does it take to make these kids successful? "A study at UCLA found that most successful kids had at least one significant adult in their lives. So we try to give them a number of adults in their life," Moncure states. The hardest obstacle to overcome is their low self-esteem and fear of success. Moncure continues, "We tell them that when you walk out the door in June, no one is going to care you were a foster child. You can't tell your boss, 'I didn't come to work today, because my mom mistreated me as a child.' He couldn't care less. We understand what is holding you back, and you can deal with the issues while you are here, but when you leave, it is time to lay that baggage aside."



"I didn't want anyone to find out that my mother was on drugs and that we were homeless. It crushed my self-esteem."

Independent Living Skills Program graduate Tamika Bennett entered the foster care system homeless.

Now she has a college degree and counsels other foster youth.

Social Workers Make a Difference

From Homeless to College Grad



ILSP Emancipation Worker Tamika Bennett gives a presentation to foster youth who are about to emancipate on how to find jobs and housing.

Tamika Bennett works for the ILSP auxiliary program as an emancipation assistant, helping foster youth who are about to transition into living on their own. She helps them find employment and housing and counsels them on overcoming obstacles of self-doubt and low self-esteem. When she tells them growing up a foster youth is no reason for not succeeding, they listen. There is no questioning her credentials.

Confident and articulate, Tamika just received her bachelors degree and is headed for graduate school. Looking at her today, it might be hard to imagine that until she entered the foster care system she spent most of her childhood homeless, living in hotel rooms and shelters, or that her mother was a crack-cocaine addict and doesn't even know who Tamika's father is.

"I didn't want anyone to find out that my mother was on drugs and that we were homeless. It was a horrible feeling to be in school and know you had nothing to come home to. It crushed my self-esteem. I was afraid to let other people know. I thought about it all the time as a child, and my nerves got bad, and my immune system broke down. I was always sick, and at one point I lost all my hair," Tamika says.

Once in the system, her life began to change. What really made a difference for Tamika was the ILSP program. She says, "I was really shy. I had never

talked to people. But they taught us you need to talk to get somewhere, and that was a lot of our training in ILSP, a lot of self-esteem building, letter writing, being assertive. So I got it. I started talking more when I was 17, then a little more at 18, and by 20 I was fine. Mr. Moncure told us we could always call him collect even if we went a long way away. So I would call him just to talk, even if I had nothing to say."

Tamika Bennett graduated with a bachelors degree in theater direction and a minor in sociology. She plans to attend graduate school and hopes to become an educational psychologist.



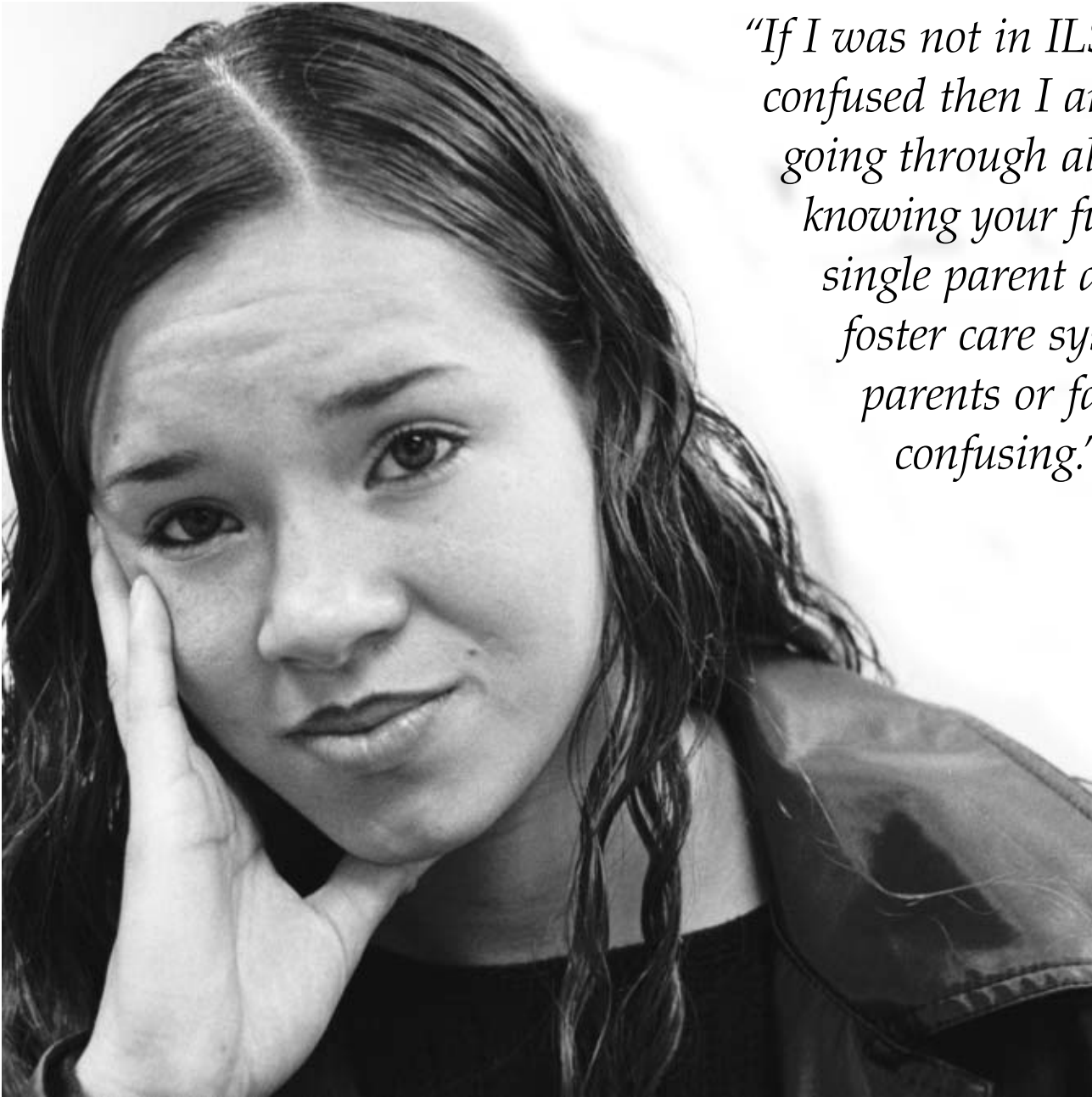
ILSP Social Worker Leonard Moncure and Jennifer

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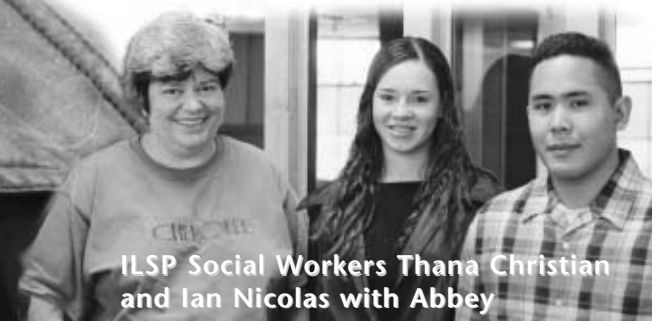
Leonard Moncure

"I never, ever thought that I was going to be going to college, because of the stereotype that foster kids aren't going to make it anywhere, that we are just stupid. But they showed us all the success stories, people graduating from college with bachelors degrees and masters, and I looked at those people and thought, 'I can definitely do this.'"

Jennifer, ILSP Graduate



"If I was not in ILSP I would be a lot more confused then I am already. It is confusing going through all of it by yourself, not knowing your future, and then being a single parent at 18, getting out of the foster care system without any parents or family. It is really confusing." **Abbey**



ILSP Social Workers Thana Christian
and Ian Nicolas with Abbey

Searching for Housing

Housing is a problem. Social workers have trouble finding proper foster homes for children entering the system and have trouble finding housing for the young adults leaving the system. Finding foster homes for teenagers is difficult, but to find one for a foster teenager with an infant is particularly challenging.

Abbey came into the system a single mother at 15. Once in the system, her problems were far from over. She has been moved four times in three years. Now she is 18 and about to exit the system, and social worker Thana Christian is trying to find her temporary housing until she and her daughter can get Section 8 housing.

Abbey didn't have much of a childhood. When she was 11 she moved in with a friend to get away from her mother, who was involved in drugs. She moved from the Midwest to California with her boyfriend when she was 13. Her boyfriend became abusive and she ended up in a battered women's shelter with her newborn daughter. "Leaving my boyfriend was a huge crisis. I was able to get out, but my social worker helped me so that I wouldn't end up going back," Abbey recalls.

Christian and social worker Ian Nicolas had recently moved Abbey into a boarding house, but a short time later the apartment manager was arrested, and the boarding house rapidly went down hill. "And this was one of our better places. We just don't have anywhere to place people," Christian states in desperation.

Nicolas shares Christian's frustration. "I'm concerned for where Abbey is. I wouldn't want any child in there. But we have no other options. It used to be very clean and well kept up, but since the manager went to jail it's declined. I wanted to put her in a more stable



Social Worker Ian Nicolas helps Abbey prepare to move.

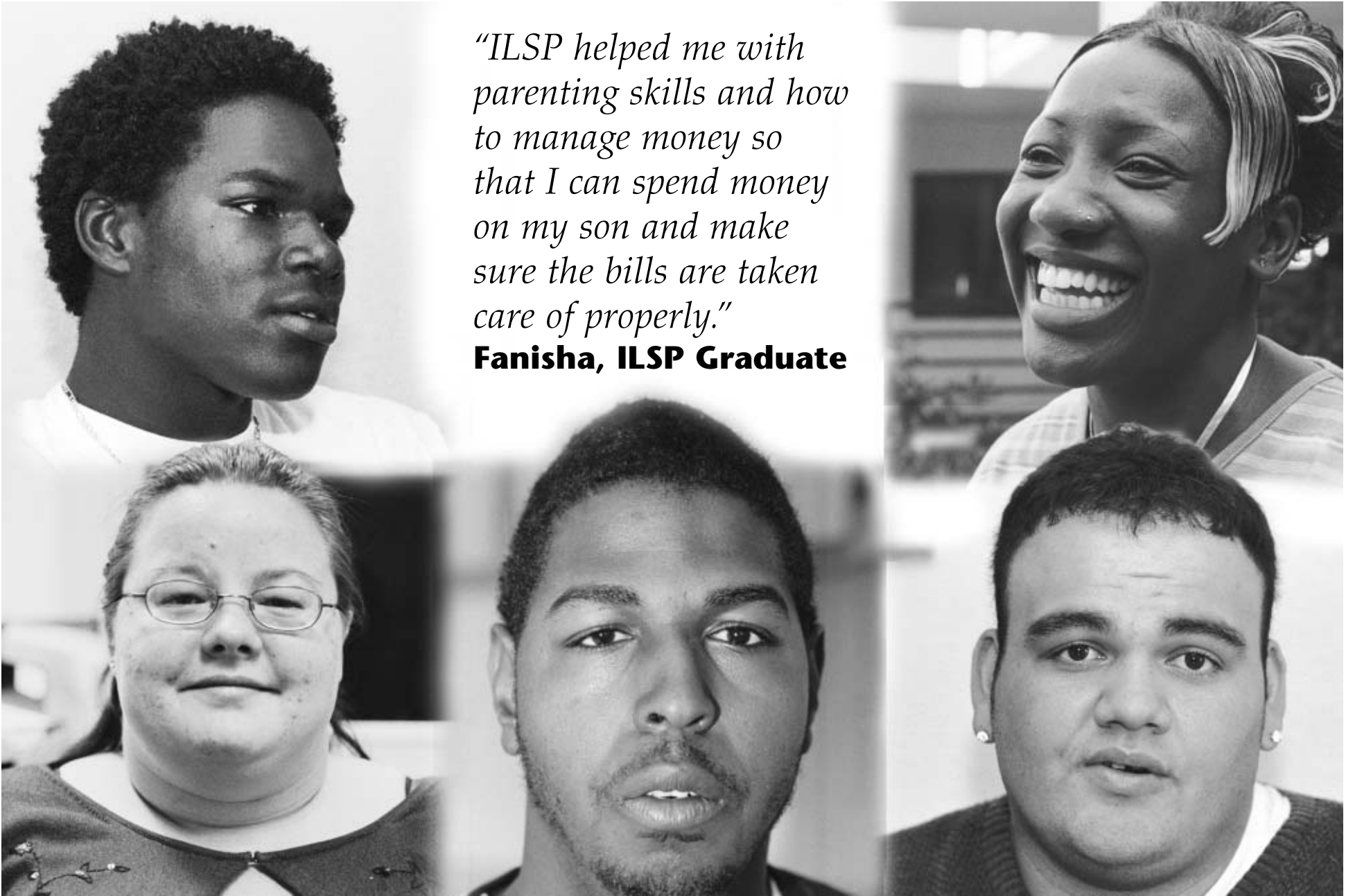


Social Worker Thana Christian spent a large portion of the morning trying to find Abbey housing. She became so concerned that she began calling her friends and her church for leads.

place, but the Bay Area rental prices are impossible. I wouldn't be able to afford most of the places I find, and I have a good salary," he says.

Abbey is in a catch 22. Because she doesn't have a permanent place to live, it is hard to get her welfare assistance, Temporary Aid to Needy Families, and child care. Without child care, she can't go to school to get her high school diploma.

"I can't wait until Selina [Abbey's daughter] has a bed of her own, and a room of her own, and some little girl sheets, and a little girl comforter, and is in a place where she can have a tricycle, and she can go to bed at night with the doors locked and know her things will still be there when she gets up. Then we can get Selina good child care, and then start on getting Abbey ready for college. We can't even deal with the underlying psychological issues and the underlying trauma because we can't get her stable food and housing. We are still working on the basic survival issues," Christian concludes. The program was eventually able to find Abbey housing.



*"ILSP helped me with
parenting skills and how
to manage money so
that I can spend money
on my son and make
sure the bills are taken
care of properly."*

Fanisha, ILSP Graduate

Children of the System

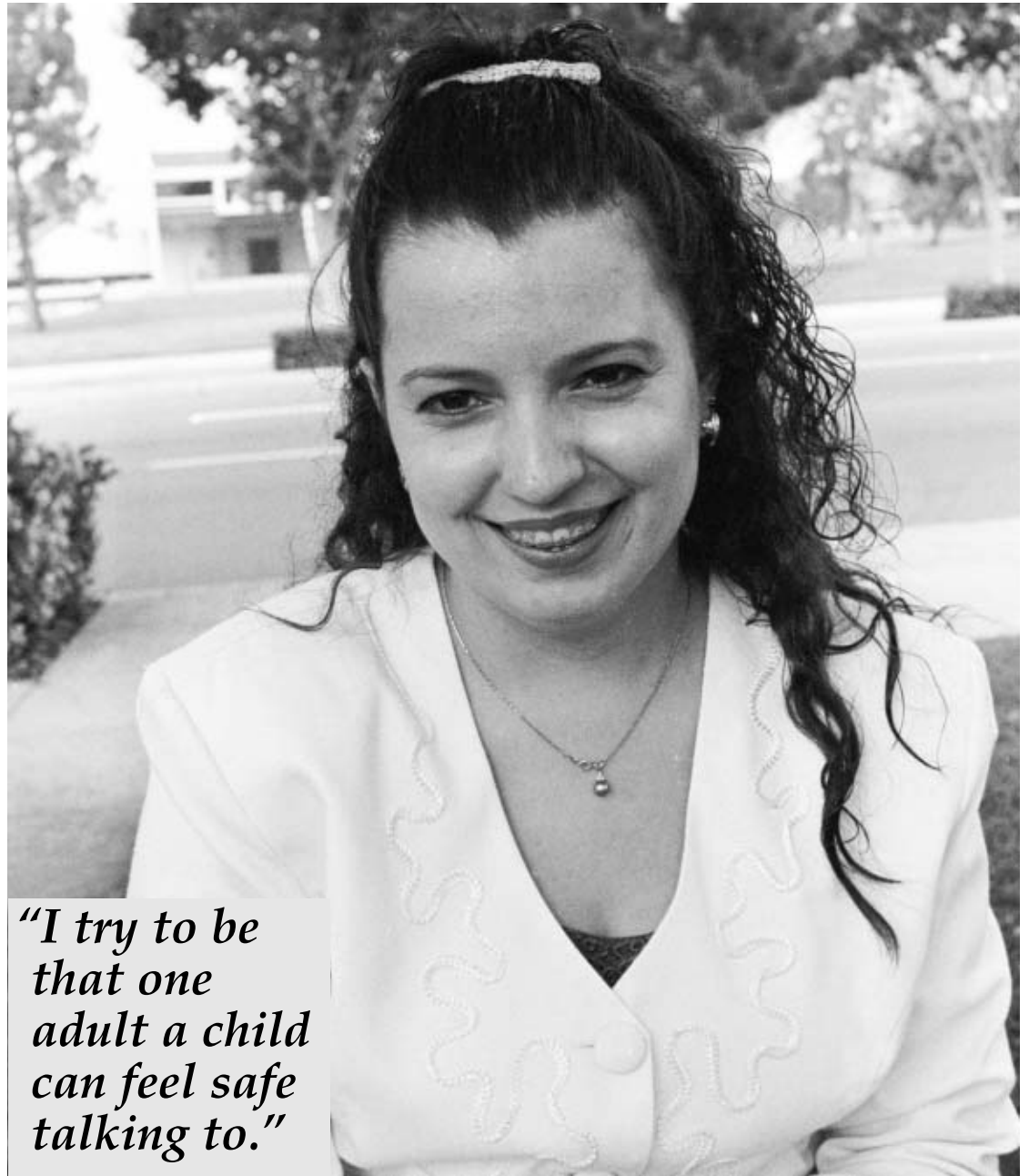
"I was born an illegitimate child, I also spent most of my childhood in and out of foster homes, and to top it off, I landed in an orphanage." **Marilyn Monroe,**
from *Marilyn* by Gloria Steinem and George Barris

Children raised in foster care are as much a part of American society as children raised by their biological parents. Marilyn Monroe, an icon of American culture, was a product of the system. Like many children of the system, she developed a strong sense of social concern for the disadvantaged. Here are the stories of some other children of the system who believe in helping others.

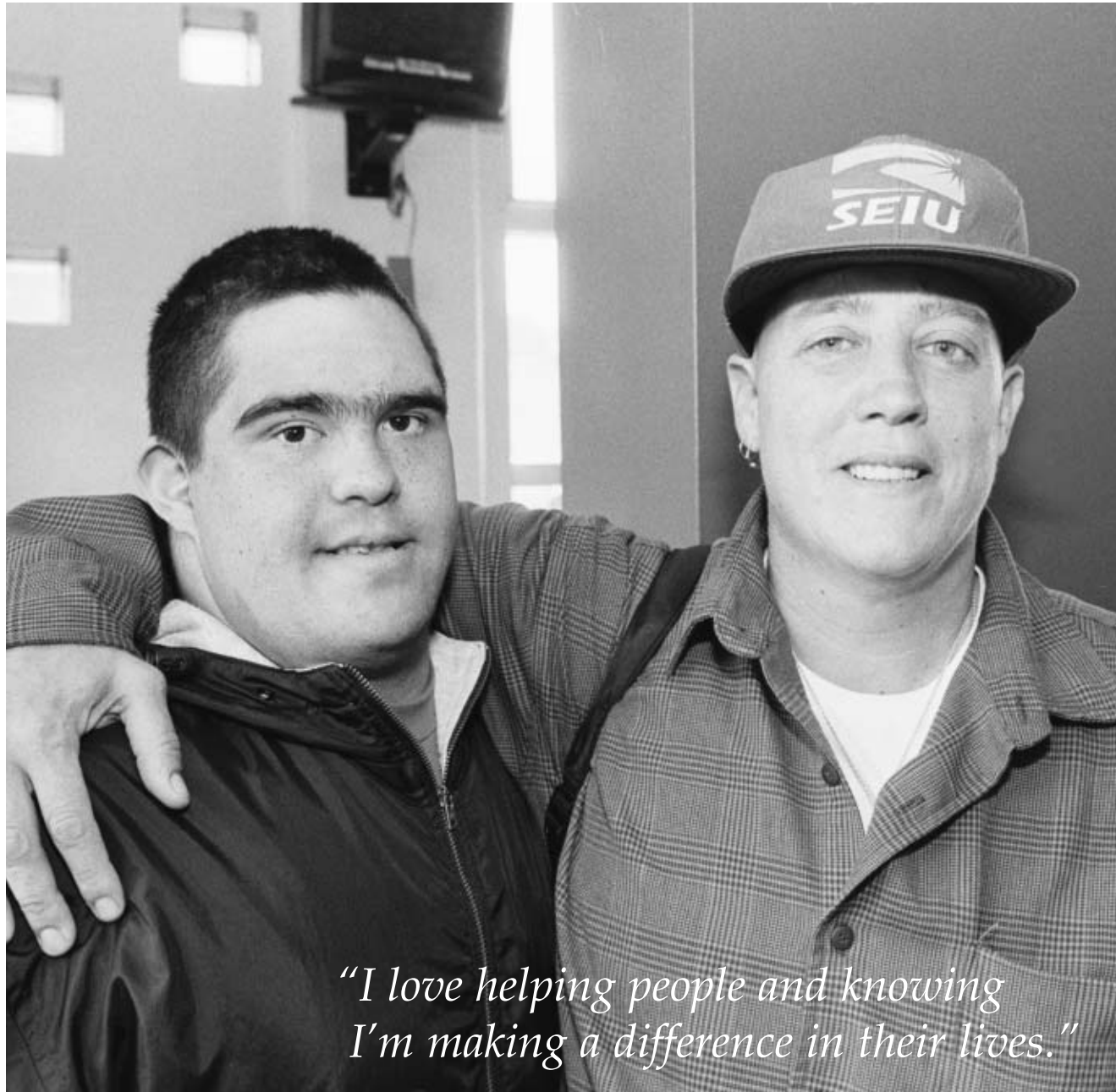
Kathy Garcia

Los Angeles community worker Kathy Garcia works with youth 14 and over to prepare them for emancipation by connecting them with independent living services, making sure they have all their papers, such as birth certificates, school transcripts, and social security cards. But most of all she is there to listen and provide a role model. Garcia's father suffered from mental illness, and her brothers would beat her and torture her with matches. "I share my experience being in foster care with them, and they trust me because what I'm telling them isn't just book learning," she states.

"I try to be that one adult a child can feel safe talking to. I understand what it is like for a foster child walking into a home full of strangers, knowing that you will be left there without any lifeline to hold on to and not knowing what to expect. The evil you know feels a lot safer than the evil you imagine, and a lot of these kids came from a home that wasn't safe, so they really have a lot of baggage."



*"I try to be
that one
adult a child
can feel safe
talking to."*



*"I love helping people and knowing
I'm making a difference in their lives."*

Tyler Vinciguerra

Community integration specialist Tyler Vinciguerra was in and out of the foster care and delinquency systems from the time she was eight until she was 18. "Things were not good back then when I was a kid, as far as getting assistance," she states. Now in her late 40s, she wants to give her clients what she didn't get.

Vinciguerra's parents were emotionally and physically abusive. She was hyperactive and had learning disabilities, such as dyslexia. She also had a lot of behavior problems as a child. In the middle of one final fight with her mother she locked herself in the bathroom and demanded her mother call the police and have her taken away.

Like many kids with childhood behavioral problems, Vinciguerra blossomed as a young adult. She studied early childhood development in college and worked in an experimental school and in drug counseling programs for adolescents. She now works with people who have developmental disabilities. "Helping others helped me understand my own process," she states.

"I love helping people and knowing I'm making a difference in their lives," Vinciguerra states. "I've had clients with behavior problems who have made 180-degree changes. I've seen them go from where whenever they would get angry, all they could do was hit walls and walk away, to where they can now get their feelings across without taking it out on property or other people."

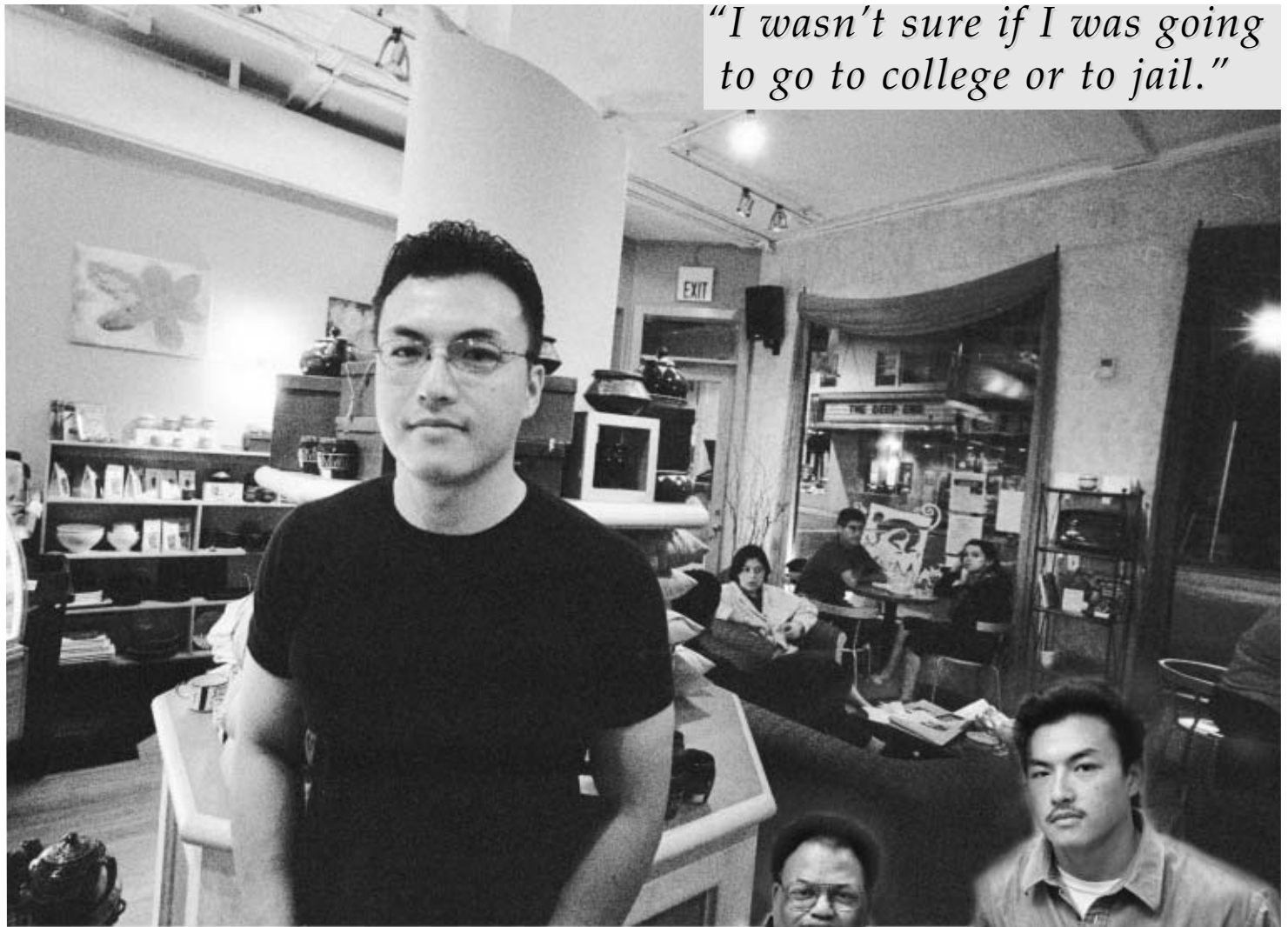
Scott Amyx

Scott Amyx was born in Korea. His father left his mother for another woman before he was born. "I felt like we were taboo because my biological father left us. People just didn't do that in Korea back then," he recalls.

Amyx and his mother emigrated to the United States when he was 10, but their lives didn't improve much. His mother eventually had a nervous breakdown, and Amyx ended up in the foster care system.

"I wasn't sure if I was going to go to college or to jail," Amyx remembers, looking back at one of the turning points in his rocky childhood. He was acting out, pushing his limits with petty crimes. Then he met Alameda County Independent Living Skills Program social worker Leonard Moncure. A short time later, Amyx received a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and was on his way to a master's degree in public policy and business.

Now a successful businessperson, Amyx has dedicated his life to helping others. One of his goals is to set up a foundation to provide scholarships for disadvantaged kids.



"I wasn't sure if I was going to go to college or to jail."

Scott Amyx at the L'Amyx Tea House (above), and six years earlier with ILSP Social Worker Leonard Moncure



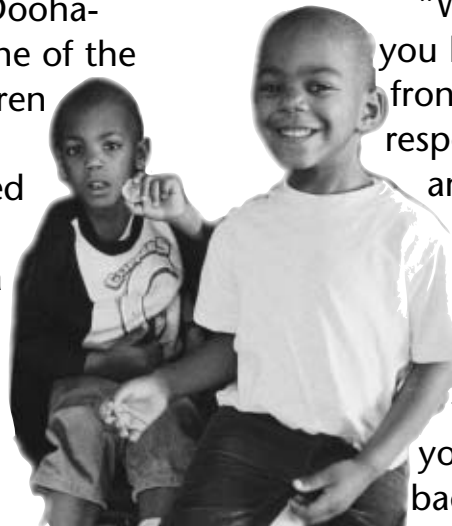
Adoption Workers: Creating New Families



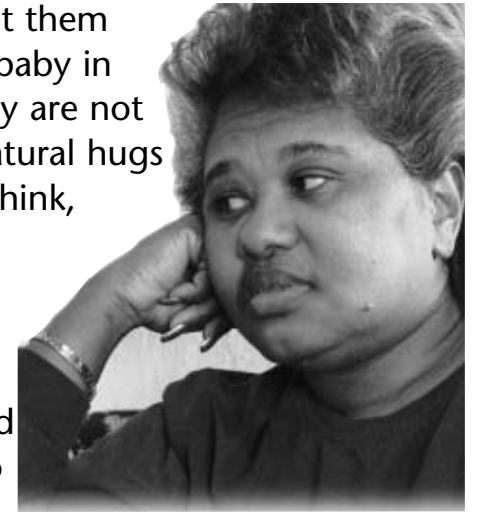
Adoptions Social Worker, Amy Dooha-Chambers (left)
with Paula McMurray and her adopted children.

Alameda County adoptions worker Amy Dooha-Chambers loves doing adoptions, and one of the reasons is the opportunity to place children with mothers like Paula McMurray.

When Paula McMurray's daughter graduated from high school, McMurray wanted to do something meaningful. She had just received a severance package from AT&T after being laid off as a result of the company's downsizing. She knew several grandparents in her community who were having trouble caring for the children of their drug-addicted daughters, so she decided to help. She began attending a program to train foster mothers to care for drug-addicted and HIV-positive babies. Since then she has adopted four children, all of whom were drug exposed. She described the experience as both the most difficult and the most rewarding in her life.



"When you first get them you have this fragile baby in front of you, but they are not responding to the natural hugs and stuff, so you think, 'What did I do wrong? Why doesn't this baby want me to hug him?' And you start feeling so bad and frustrated, because who doesn't respond to a hug? But they can't, so you have to keep doing it and doing it without getting the gratification. Then finally one day you see the baby smile, or maybe he sleeps all night, or maybe the tremors are not over the whole body but just over the face—that is the best part—you get to watch this wonderful metamorphosis take place. Before you had no idea what was going to happen. All you had was hope and the belief that it was going to be okay, and now you get to see this wonderful being come to life."





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Parenting Classes





Social Worker Gail Cervantes

"We no longer have a village to help raise children. We provide the knowledge that was once handed down generation to generation. We teach parents everything they need to know to raise children from prenatal to 18. For example, if their kids won't do the dishes, how to teach them by 'showing, not telling,' and to use the time to bond. This is a time to talk to them while you are teaching them. We even teach clients how to date. They need to know this in order to show their teenage children how to date. It is a second and third generational type of thing."

Mary

"I've learned a lot. My life wasn't going in the right direction, and they guided me through and showed me other ways of handling certain situations. I was a very argumentative person with a temper. I have five children, and being a single parent, it was hard to get my point across. Now I take the time to stop and listen, instead of yelling at my children and all the neighbors hearing it.

"My father was an alcoholic and I

didn't understand effective parenting. In the class I learned how to discipline in a positive way, how to praise and promote positive behavior. Time outs are good. Before I wasn't feeling very fulfilled. Now I'm in recovery. I'm going to school to become a cosmetologist, my daughter is getting A's, and my son got citizen of the month. We are all proud of each other. The classes have been a blessing."



Bobby

"You don't learn this stuff on the street. I had a lot of domestic violence issues and did not handle my problems well. Now I'm learning to communicate and listen to the other person. They didn't teach us that in school. You learn violence more than anything. Everyone is fighting. This has been a change of pace. They forced me to come here, but I wish I came here a long time ago."



Parenting classes are one of the most popular and effective services provided by children and family social workers. Social workers like Gregg Fritchle, Mary Nazemi, and Geoff Stephen teach classes after working their normal shifts. Parents in Los Angeles who complete these classes have a 16% recidivism rate, compared to a 50% or 60% recidivism rate for parents who don't attend the classes.

"We allow the students to share their own experience, and that is a valuable thing. They learn from each other so they can find the solutions themselves."

Social Worker Mary Nazemi